AIDS

(1988) by Adam Mars-Jones and Edmund White. The poet and novelist Paul Monette has written Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir (1988), an eloquent account of a decade of living with Paul Horowitz, who died in 1986. Other memoirs include a mother’s story, The Screaming Room (1986) by Barbara Peabody, that of a wife, Good-bye, I Love You (1986) by Carol Lynn Pearson, and those of several persons with AIDS, including Mortal Embrace: Living with AIDS (1988) by the Frenchman Emmanuel Dreuilhe. In 1985 NBC Television presented a drama, An Early Frost, with Aidan Quinn, which offered a sensitive exploration of the emotional effects of the disease on a person with AIDS and his family. Bill Sherwood’s independently made film Parting Glances (1986) focused on a relationship between two men, one of whom has AIDS. Several leading contemporary photographers, including Nicholas Nixon, Rosalind Solomon, and Brian Weil, have produced moving portraits of people with AIDS.

The Names Project Quilt began early in 1987 with a single cloth panel to commemorate one person who died of AIDS. In a little over a year the project grew to over 5000 panels, which were exhibited in a national tour. The colorful panels are rectangular and contain the name of the deceased which is painted on or appliqued. The victim’s survivors who make the quilts often add other appliques of cloth, sequins, and the like to suggest favorite residences and avocations of the departed. The quilt, which takes up a long-established American folk tradition, constitutes a collective work of anonymous art. Not only has it provided a moving experience for visitors, it may serve as a salutory challenge to existing elitist notions of art itself.

None of this cultural activity can be construed as a “silver lining” that in any way compensates for the enormous suffering that AIDS has caused, but it gives evidence of a real effort to confront the problem rather than to hide it or to hide from it.


Ward Houser

ALAN OF LILLE

(CA. 1120–1203)

French theologian and poet. A prolific writer in Latin, Alan was a leading figure in the “Renaissance” of the twelfth century. His surviving works include disquisitions in practical and speculative theology; sermons; a preaching manual; a theological dictionary; a guide for confessors; an attack on heretics; a book of versified parables; and two substantial poetic allegories, Anticlaudianus and The Complaint of Nature.

In the last-named work Alan offered original variations on the Early Christian polemic against homosexual behavior as a sin against nature. These animadversions were prompted by the prevalence of sodomy among the clergy of his day, which Alan opposed. In a series of ingenious, if bizarre comparisons, Alan likened sexual inversion to grammatical barbarism. This allegory of grammatical “conjugation,” licit or illicit, was to have many successors throughout the Middle Ages. In a more general sense, Alan is a link in a chain of
antihomosexual argument based on the claim that it is unnatural.


Wayne R. Dynes

ALBANIA

Until recent decades, remoteness and a distinctive language permitted this Balkan country to retain, more than its neighbors, cultural traits from the past. Travelers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century noted that Albanian men showed a particular passion for handsome youths, so much so that they would even kill one another in disputes over them. Albanians would also contract male–male pacts which were blessed by priests of the Orthodox church; these, it was claimed, were Platonic. Yet this assertion of purity seems to be contradicted by a common term for the pederast, biùthar, literally "butt man." Among the Muslim Sufis some held a belief in reincarnation; having lived a previous life as women, they believed, it would be natural for some men to be attracted to male sex objects. It is tempting to regard these customs as a provincial relic of Greek institutionalized pederasty, or even (following Bernard Ser- gent) of some primordial "Indo-European" homosexuality. Sometimes the Albanians attributed the custom to a Gypsy origin. Yet Turkish Islamic influence is a more likely source, supplemented by the Byzantine custom of brotherhood pacts. Of further interest is the fact that many Janissaries and Mamluks were recruited among the Albanians.

Since 1945 Albania has been ruled by a puritanical and repressive Marxist regime. Although homosexuality is not mentioned in the Penal Code, elementary prudence requires that relations between "friends" be conducted with the utmost discretion. Foreign tourists report sexual contacts—but only with other tourists.


ALBERTINE COMPLEX

In Remembrance of Things Past, Marcel Proust's female character Albertine contains elements taken from the personality of the novelist's chauffeur Agostinelli, with whom Proust was in love. Accordingly, it has been suggested that the habit of gay and lesbian novelists—once a necessity—of "heterosexualizing" relationships by changing the sex of the characters be called the "Albertine complex." In W. Somerset Maugham's Of Human Bondage (1915) the waitress with whom the main character is in love is surely a man in disguise. A different device appears in Willa Cather's My Ántonia (1918), where the choice of male authorial persona, Jim, allows the writer to express interest in various female characters.

It must be granted that this critical procedure can be reductive if it simply seeks to "restore the true sex" to a character that is a composite product of the literary imagination. It may also falsely imply that gay and lesbian novelists are incapable of creating convincing characters of the opposite sex. Nonetheless, E. M. Forster gave eloquent testimony of his dissatisfaction with the procedure by abandoning writing novels in mid-career. After writing five published books simulating heterosexual relationships (and one, Maurice, on a homosexual's quest for love, which Forster believed was unpublishable), he declined to play the game any longer.

A related, though different phenomenon appears in the disguise dramas of the Renaissance. La Calandria (1513), by Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, concerns two twins, one male, one female. The twins appear on stage four times, once both dressed as women, once both dressed as men, once in reverse attire, and once (at the end) in the appropriate dress. These